

One of the most exciting events of the summer is the return of **X**, after four years of what the band is now calling a sabbatical. The reconstituted L.A. band plays the Chestnut next Tuesday. The group's quite good new album *hey Zeus!* (Big Life/Mercury) has none of the signs of a reunion album. They may not have picked up quite where they left off, but the sound is just as sharp, especially the harmonies of John Doe and Exene Cervenka and the song writing though Doe and Cervenka rarely collaborate is just as incisive.

The American political climate plays a role in their lyrics, whether subtly on "Someone's Watching" and "Big Blue House," or more obviously on "Country At War" and "Arms For Hostages." X does not propagandize or preach. They just state what they see usually with wicked sarcasm and leave the rest to the listener.

The lay-off -- where both Doe and Cervenka released solo albums -- has served to reinvigorate the group. The vocals sound consistently inspired and the instrumental work equally impressive, with both Tony Gilkyson's guitar and D.J. Bonebrake's drums standing out on "Country At War."

The band's original fans may complain that their new work is more generic, but early on X broadened their scope to include all kinds of music from folk to country. Those influences have been blended into the sound such as the acoustic guitar on "Into the Light," but do not dominate. Primarily, this is a tough, hard kick-ass rock album. But what separates X is the depth of intelligence in their music. Always passionate, this is music built to last. *hey Zeus!* is a welcome and needed return.

Opening is North Carolina pop/rock band **Dillon Fence** who recently released their second album *Outside In* (Mammoth). Dillon Fence is a pleasantly melodic band who suffer from a sameness in the sound of their songs. Singer Greg Humphrey's vocals do not match the sound of the guitars, which give the songs their spark.

Though the group's sound can be charging, they are most impressive on the softer material such as the acoustic instrumental "Union Grove" and "Any Other Way." If they applied the fierceness displayed on "Headache," the pure pop of "Black Eyed Susan," the instrumental exploration at the beginning of "Inward Ho," or the yearning moodiness of "Hard to Please" to their other tunes, they'd be much more appealing.

Peter Gabriel returns Tuesday for three nights at the Spectrum. I listened to his latest album *US* (Geffen) a little bit when it first came out last year, then forgot about it. I put it on again recently and was surprised how much of it I've heard somewhere or other, like maybe telephone company commercials. It's all right in a dreary sort of mopey way. Manu Katche provides his trademark drum sound, Daniel Lanois provides typical ambiance and there's musicians from all over the world including studio heavies, Doudouk players, horn players, string players and everybody's fave Sinéad O'Connor. Probably some of them will be with him at the show. A nice touch is that Gabriel sometimes lists what guitars the guitarists use in the credits.

Gabriel earnestly sings every song so that none of them stand out above any of the others. Some of it is very nice like the harmonies on "Blood of Eden," which I've noticed now twice. The lyrics, which try their best to be significant until Gabriel actually sings them appear to be about some kind of mental crash. I could dig up the publicity to confirm this, but I'd rather not. Anyway, I seem to remember various interviews when *US* came out and probably saw more than a few bits about it along with the video of Gabriel covered with insects on MTV. Actually, I've had a major sinus headache all

day and this album is something akin to a Valium or two.

It should be a tranquil, ambient, significant, earnest, psychologically probing, three nights of international Gabriel music at the Spectrum.

A few days before that, **10,000 Maniacs** (who are anything but) and **World Party** return to the Mann. 10,000 Maniacs somehow are now being mysteriously classified as a soul band. I saw them on Letterman last week and Natalie Merchant doesn't need a translator half as much as she used to, but Booker T and the MGs they ain't.

I kind of like World Party's latest album *Bang* (Chrysalis). Karl Wallinger (for all intents and purposes World Party) is like a musical blender tossing in ingredients of bluegrass, '60s psychedelic, funk and hard rock arriving at a cohesive enjoyable sound. Wallinger is heavily influenced by such British rockers as the Kinks and the Beatles. Wallinger is probably more sarcastic and negative than both. Take the lyric of "And God Said....," performed as an opera: "And God said 'look after the planet!' But Man said 'Fuck you!'"

A lot of this album looks back at an earlier time musically, but there's an inventiveness, adventure and a sense of humor pervading virtually every track.

It was quite evident during Rosanne Cash's set at the Tower last week that she needs another band. Yeah, they get the sound of her latest album and all, but there was the same sleek soulless groove on every song. Cash sang fairly well, even though the theater was still filling up during most of her set. But the show had none of the feel that made her appearance a couple of years back at TLA special. Performing mostly material from her latest, *The Wheel*, her band sort of came alive for the rocker "Roses In the Fire," but when the highlight is a cover of "Wouldn't It Be Lovely?" something is wrong.

Once you've seen Lyle Lovett's Large Band, you can pretty much rest assured that you've seen them. Sure Lovett is more at ease as a performer each time around, and continually works on the pacing of his shows. He's also getting his between song comedic timing down. He can make taking a between-song drink a riot.

But his band, no matter how large -- in fact the largeness is the most impressive thing about them -- plod rather than swing, and now resort to shtick (giving the illusion of lights shining from the saxophone horns) to make the show more exciting.

Lovett's best songs remain the ones he doesn't need the band to perform, and his "swing" tunes walk a thin line between homage and mockery.